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Central Intelligence Agency

Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

11 June 1984

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Afghanistan: Victory Eludes Soviets in the Panjsher Valley [redacted]

Summary

The Soviets' seventh offensive into the strategically located Panjsher Valley, designed to deal a major blow to the insurgents, achieved no important gains. Although the Soviets committed more air and ground power to the operation than in previous campaigns, they repeated past mistakes.

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The insurgents are likely to emerge from the offensive with a significant psychological victory that will leave them as strong as ever and more united. They probably will continue to increase pressure on Soviet supply lines, and because of their ability to evade the Soviets, will provide few occasions for major battles.

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If the Soviets had destroyed the guerrilla organization in the Panjsher, it would have been a significant blow to the insurgents. The overall Afghan resistance effort, however, probably would

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] the Pakistan/Afghanistan/Bangladesh Branch, South Asia Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. It was coordinated with the Office of Soviet Analysis and Directorate of Operations. Information as of 8 June 1984 was used in its preparation. Questions and comments should be directed to Chief, South Asia Division, [redacted]

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only have been temporarily affected. Other insurgent groups likely would have continued operations in the northeast. [REDACTED]

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Seventh Offensive

The Soviets began their seventh offensive into the Panjsher Valley on 20 April 1984, launching large-scale air and artillery attacks against suspected insurgent positions. The offensive ended almost 19 months of relative peace in the valley. We believe the Soviets decided to abandon negotiations with Panjsher Valley resistance leader Masood on extending the truce and to resume operations in the area in response to more frequent attacks by Panjsher guerrillas against Soviet and Afghan facilities and convoys outside the valley. The Soviets also were undoubtedly concerned about the continuing buildup of the Panjsher insurgents' military capabilities. [REDACTED]

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The offensive into the Panjsher began, for the first time in Afghanistan, with high-altitude bombing missions by Soviet-based TU-16s and SU-24s. The Soviets also increased their air assets at Bagram airbase, from which they flew medium and low altitude sorties against targets in and near the Panjsher. Some 20,000 Soviet and Afghan troops, the largest number ever assembled for a Panjsher operation, were committed to the campaign. Major units moved into the valley accompanied by over 500 armored vehicles, and by late April some had advanced almost to Khenj. [REDACTED]

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The Soviets began a new phase of combat in late April and early May by making a greater attempt than in previous offensives to seal the Panjsher and prevent insurgents from escaping. A large number of Soviet troops entered the Andarab Valley, northwest of the Panjsher, apparently to try to strike at insurgents who use the Andarab as a route to and from the Panjsher and to find and destroy Masood's bands. Soviet and regime forces also moved into several of the smaller side valleys adjacent to the Panjsher, where they met stiff resistance. [REDACTED]

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Soviet Goals Frustrated

The Soviets, despite the unprecedented intensity of the campaign, failed to destroy the Panjsher Valley resistance or eliminate Masood, who has become a symbol to the insurgents. [REDACTED]

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-- The insurgents successfully attacked behind Soviet lines and used mines to inflict what the Soviets probably believe are high casualties, given the low level of fighting.

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- High-altitude bombing was inaccurate and of limited effectiveness against Masood's mobile insurgent groups. Their mountain bases, defensive positions, and supply lines are almost invisible targets. Civilian casualties also appear to have been low because most left the valley before the offensive.
- Clearing operations in the side valleys have failed to interdict guerrilla supply or escape routes. [REDACTED]

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We believe the Soviets underestimated the capabilities and strategy of Masood's guerrillas. [REDACTED] the insurgents had long anticipated a Soviet assault in the Panjsher Valley this spring on the expiration of the cease-fire, and, in our judgment, were well prepared. Masood used the cease-fire to build his forces, improve his relations with other area insurgent groups, strengthen his defenses, and increase his weapons supplies. [REDACTED]

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Cooperation among insurgents was significantly better than during previous Soviet operations in the Panjsher Valley. Groups from as far away as Ghazni as well as the Shomali and nearby areas have provided assistance to the Panjsher insurgents. We believe many resistance leaders, particularly those in the northeast, have offered Masood some support, but his progress in achieving long-term cooperation of all area insurgent groups is likely to be slow. Some insurgent bands reportedly ignored unity appeals and continued to obstruct Masood's supply lines. [REDACTED]

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Soviet Plans

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The Soviets apparently intend to leave a sizable force in the Panjsher to deny Masood's forces the valley's use as base, but we do not believe the Soviets will maintain a force large enough to secure the entire valley. A large force would have problems maneuvering in the valley's narrow confines, be difficult to supply, and be more vulnerable to insurgent attacks. The Soviets also would significantly decrease their capabilities to respond to challenges elsewhere in Afghanistan unless they bring more troops into the country. Use of Afghan troops for garrison duty in the Panjsher probably would be counterproductive because the Afghans are poorly trained and unreliable. [REDACTED]

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The Soviets may try to negotiate a new cease-fire with Masood while maintaining troops in the valley to ensure his compliance with the conditions of any agreement. [REDACTED]

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The Soviets may try to resettle the Panjsher Valley with regime loyalists and conduct extensive propaganda campaigns to dissuade civilians in the area from supporting the resistance. We believe that most Panjsheris who have fled the valley will be reluctant to return, fearing reprisals by the insurgents or renewed Soviet bombing campaigns. Many of those who do return probably will collaborate clandestinely with the insurgents, providing warning of impending Soviet attacks and supplying Masood's forces with food and financial assistance. [redacted]

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Soviet control of the Panjsher Valley would not be a critical blow to the resistance in the northeast in our judgment. [redacted]

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Outlook

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Moscow could decide to implement tactical changes if the campaigns this spring and summer end without decisive Soviet gains, perhaps reemphasizing small unit actions as it did earlier in the war. The Soviets may send in more battalion-sized units, but we see little evidence that they are preparing to implement major changes in manpower levels. The Soviets will not receive much assistance from the impotent Afghan military. [redacted]

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Continued frustration in containing the insurgency could cause Moscow to consider limited cross-border forays into Pakistan. The Soviets almost certainly recognize, however, that the political costs of such attacks would be great and the military benefits uncertain. [redacted]

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Masood's survival will increase his prestige and that of the Panjsher insurgents both within the country and internationally. He probably will be able to expand his organization in northeastern Afghanistan. The Panjsher insurgents' victory will also boost the morale of the insurgency as a whole. [redacted]

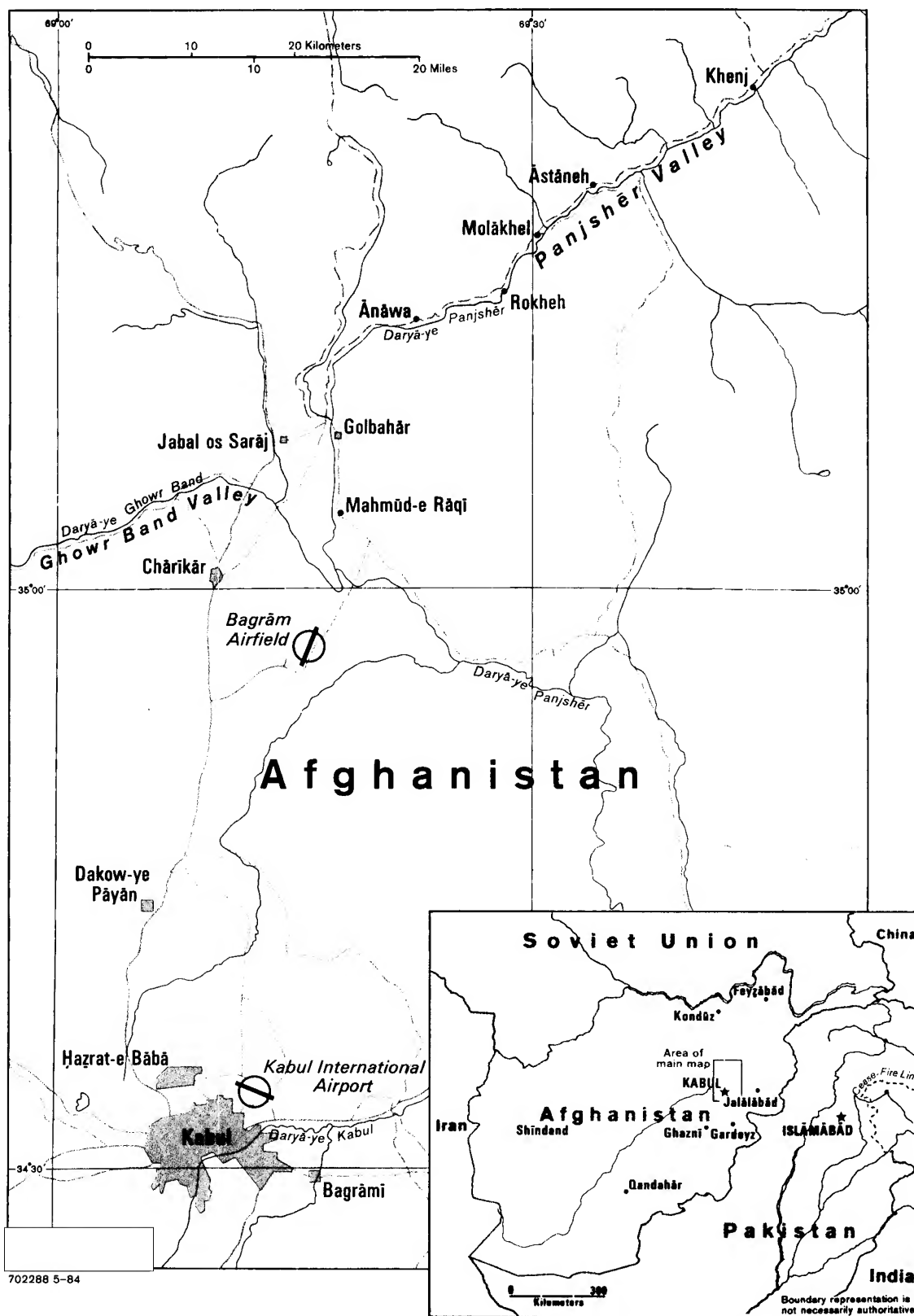
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Even if Masood were killed, we believe the overall resistance would suffer only a temporary setback. Other insurgent leaders in northern Afghanistan--as effective as Masood but less known outside the country--would continue their operations, perhaps subsuming remnants of Masood's organization into their groups. [redacted]

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